

RollPlay



GM NOTEBOOK
ISSUE TWENTYNINE

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Welcomed Crossings, Patrons!

This month, as with many Decembers, is a little sparse for GM Prep content, given how few shows we usually do this month. The Christmas With Cox one-shot was a delightful opportunity for me to take a break from GMing and take on the player roll (as well as part-time Dungeon World coach for Jesse) and I hope you've had the opportunity to watch that silly, fun game. Most of my mind has been in a transitional state for both Far Verona and Court of Swords - Far Verona moving from the Berkmann mission to the upcoming visit to Imperial Prime and Court of Swords heading for our big 100th episode this month. I expect there will be plenty to say in next month's zine about that, particularly. In digging through my old notes, I found the barest bones of a Dark Souls RPG thing I was brainstorming and wanted to add it here, if only to illustrate that in the end, game design and GMing belong in the same notebook! Maybe you can make some sense of it, this is as far as I ever went with the design...

Thank you so much for your support, and welcome to Issue 29 of the GM's Notebook.

Adam Koebel
RollPlay GM



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Court of Swords:

Episode 95

Notes



Court of Swords: Episode 95 Notes

the Temple of the Moon "Embers in the Wind"

- there is a supernatural threat to the River Me Bac, the priests of the temple have foreseen a dark presence in the deeper caves; something is haunting the slumbering spirits with bad dreams
- if the PCs want anything, the temple will ask them to intervene and investigate

Whichever way the PCs go, a cool dungeon or something lies ahead...

the apothecary: Doctor Xiz (no levels, 4 hp) (insight 15)
she likes Maharib

(Disciple Lek, first healed by Berg)

An aspect of Imix called Kravyād, the funeral pyre, that which burns away the dead.
Another, Jatavedasam, the fires of inspiration.

- the PCs are headed to a meeting with Sei Sai, who wants to figure out their agenda and use them to advance their goals

Notes About the Temple

- the moon is the Arcana of secrets, illusions, change and adaptation
- they're magical, arcane and have spies + magicians at their command
- if they were a magic deck they'd be UBSW

Episode 96

- temple of the sun = 100 dungeon
 - final goal is the gate to heaven
 - the place is rife with the dead
- } the whole place is crawling with chaos

Episode 97

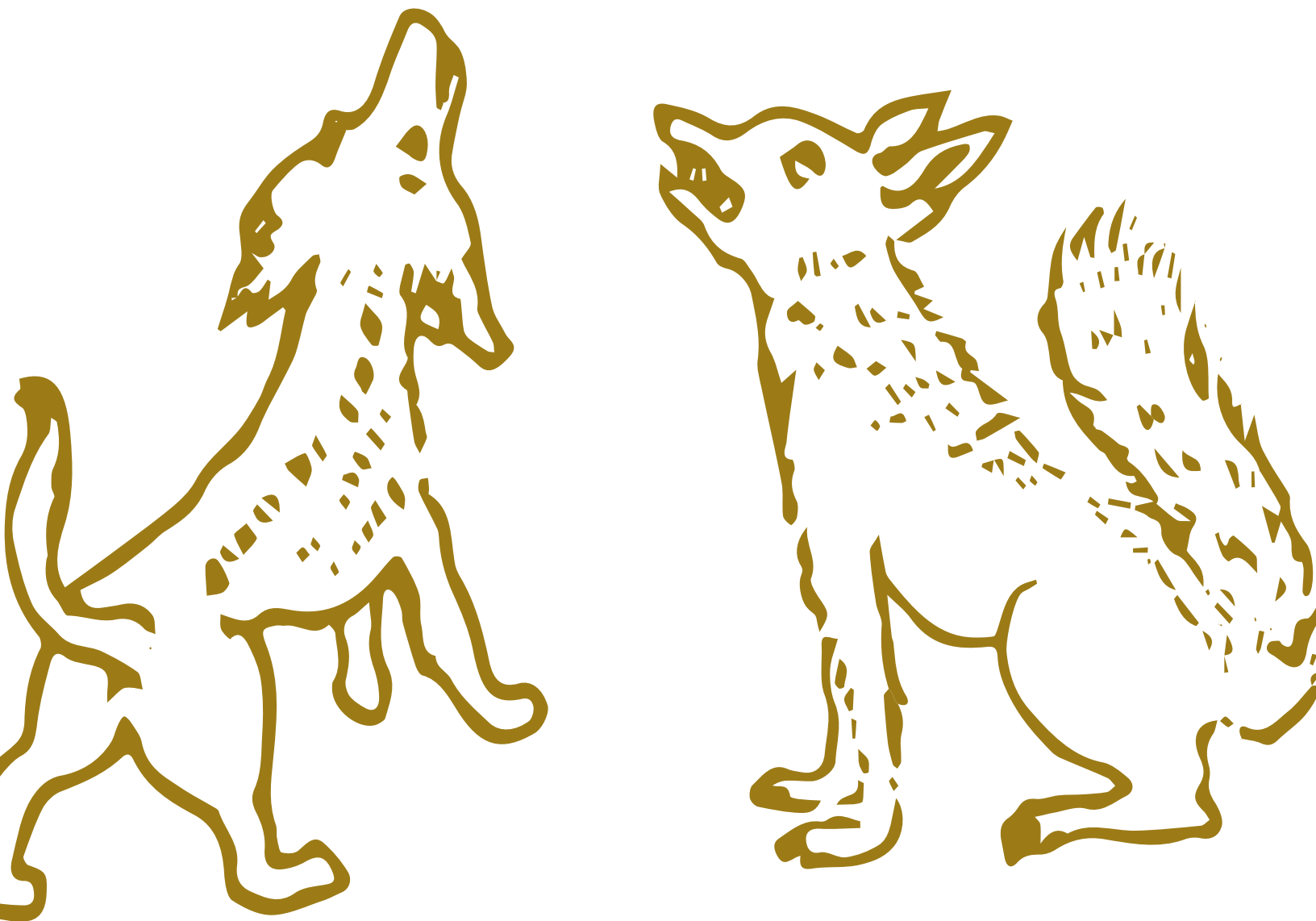
- some preamble: find a place for the old man, last conversations with Sai Sei
- Berg is approached by a young acolyte, the dwarf-girl from earlier (Dust of Dreams) who has a warning for him - Ramus is becoming dangerous, but a new soul may not be enough - the darkness whose Kingdom they are entering seeks out the soulless one, and the embers of the father of flame may be no better allies. There may come a time when Ramus proves to weak to resist corruption: will Berg be strong enough to do what must be done?

the moon bridge: traveling the sacred path unprepared will be a dangerous journey - the presence of the unclean draws hungry demons! (a timed battle with repeatedly spawning foes)

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Court of Swords:

Episode 97



Court of Swords: Episode 97 (Continued)

"The Moon Bridge"

- when the PCs arrive at the end of the moon bridge, they've been deposited in a cursed nightmare ruin: a former river village in the middle of nowhere, cursed + destroyed for their pious defense and rejection of the True Darkness. The town is a ghoulish hellscape of death, occupied only by the dead.
- the moon bridge is exhausting: ask for a DC 15 Con save or inflict a level of exhaustion
- the town is defiled ground and sleeping or eating here is a deadly risk - luckily, the true servants of the Necromancer King have left - only the hungry dead remain tied to this place
- the PCs will have to escape the ruins before orienting themselves for travel
- no survivors in the village, but the PCs might engage some corrupted local deity or alert the Necromancer King's servants to their presence

blinded: nobody

✓ episode 97: arrive in the riverlands 18th

episode 98: face the darkness 8th

episode 99: travel to the temple 15th

episode 100: the golden sun monastery 19th

} plotting the arc to the 100th, generally the goal is to liberate the monastery from the King and establish a base there (?) [take a look at Matt's book]
→ the idea here being a more large-scale base of operations in the Court of Swords.

[Shangren, the old man.]

↳ he and Nin Nin work for the Moon now.

* the oracle portends doom for Ramus whatever path he takes, either he falls to darkness or is consumed by fire

• after a conversation with the other PCs, Borg decided that she might've been a charlatan

Maharib might be the Knight of Swords?! (he's here to rekindle the old pact between Imix and his people)

• the Giants were competitors to the humans, wiped out ages ago to make room for them
humans/heaven vs. primordial/giants vs. [the weird elder things]

heaven tricked the giants into fighting the elder whatever, then leveraged their power against the primordials

5.

FAR VERONA: EPISODE 20

Far Verona: Episode 20 (?)

- Lau is still at large, Alders in custody, the elder is a loose end

Goals:

- Gabriel: eliminate Talat Lau
- Kiran: secure a replacement
- Booker: take the Elder Miguela into custody as per our orders
- Nomi: obtain Miguela's cooperation

[Doyle failed to be inspired.]

[the Ambassador trusts Nomi unquestioningly]

[Crux has a recording of the interaction with Lau.]

Booker's CI: Syed Horvath, a helpful contact in Miguela's staff (he's part of her PA team)

Miguela has been moved to a secure church facility outside the city.

• The Emira is going to meet with Miguela at her facility. She's paranoid, uncertain, ultimately pro-Empire.



6.

FAR VERONA: EPISODE 21

Far Verona: Episode 21

- we did levelling up!

Goals:

- booker: have a party ✗
- gabriel: deliver an ultimatum to the head of the church on Berkmann ○
- nomi: get official crux status and rank on the ship ✗
- the emira: execute my villainous plan ✗

- ★ Crusader Gabriel promised the Inquisitor that he'd keep an eye on it. The high church wants him to back off. He's having a crisis, maybe bring in the Crusaders.

"House Vela needs me more than Crux does." [Kate's cat, a synth.]

- Nomi meets with the captain (as a Serpens) → could this be the reincarnation of a certain espionage feline? we'll never know for sure...
- the Emira wants
→ HVS Nothing Lasts Forever (a light freighter) will get you April 14th

[the Aunt is an STO stooge]



TRANSMISSION: GSABCEFH IJKLMN O PQR TUVWXY Z

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SWAN SONG

GM NOTES



Mirrorshades: The Zoku princess is Bonbon's COUSIN

Swan Song:

* Argent: the Consortium

"I'm sorry, Wu"

♦ Start with a scene on the Swan Song, "some time ago" Connor + Mr. Sizarian are in the mess hall together. Connor wants to know "what is it like to kill people for a living"

• Cut to the warehouse, grenades dancing in slow motion through the air...

phase one { ~~Mr. Sizarian: running for cover ~ make a PE save to get to cover, if yes then Luck save + 3 if no just Luck save~~
* if success, then 1/2 dmg } 3d10 + 4 (grenades, fire, collapsing building)
if fail, then full } minus [10-AC]
~~Kalaya + Mustafa: Luck save or die~~

Horrible fire, building collapsing, etc. to escape: PE save * fail = 2d10 (= [10-AC])

* As for Wu, unless someone goes into the HORRIBLE CONFLAGRATION to save him

(PE save. Success = 1/2 dmg fail = full and out [2d8] } if left behind { Van Doorne finds him and "fixes" the poor boy
takes 1d4 rounds to get in, 1d4-1 to get out) } CYBER WU

> AFTERMATH

• Rejani Van Doorne takes control of Mustafa/Kalaya's enterprise within a few weeks, leaves the planet to go and firm up her control

• the Mandarinate sends an Inspector Matthew Lu Shen, to see what happened (ask for bribes)

• shit is chaotic for a week or so...

→ Str, Poise, etc

(old-school D+D heck dark souls thing?) Armor slows, but defends } hmmm

↳ individual death = lose souls

TPK = reset monsters

Shield parry, etc.

↓
MAP

* gear threshold based on END, penalties for heavy

[STR, END, POI,] + VITALITY + ATTUNE // FAITH // INT

SOULS
BOOST
STATS

* Simulate duelling style combat? (bidding? based on poise? YES) replace XP

☐ “I’m Sorry, Wu”

- ☐ This will likely go down in my RPG history as maybe the most emotionally stirring moment of a campaign. Certainly, we’ve come close (Ramus’ use of the Command spell during one of the live live Court of Swords episodes is pretty stunning, for example, or Dodger’s hard choice at the end of Nebula Jazz) but this was the first time we showed the audience that player choice had ramifications. Though it might not have gone this way.
- ☐ We ended on a cliffhanger, with Mr.Sicarian caught between his friendship with the plucky engineer and his hatred for Blue Fever and all it represented. If I remember right, I had a week to figure out how to GM a massive drug-lab explosion, and this was the bit before all that. I remember wanting to start with a cut-back - reading this again, I think about how aggressively I used these kinds of scenes in Swan Song. Jumping back and forth in time, playing with perspectives.
- ☐ Everything here was me wondering what to do - these notes were after the end of an episode, thinking on what would come next. I remember asking Kevin Crawford (the game’s author) and the G+ Stars Without Number group what to do and building on their feedback. It’s why so much of this section is crossed out - I changed my mind from my original plan

☐ CYBERWU

- ☐ For example, I decided that little Wu was better off a sacrifice to the murder-hobo nature of the PCs than to be allowed to come back. I wasn’t going to dampen the impact by doing a Death and Return scenario, here. Though I would, later, use this idea for Randy, as a much less serious return in the live live Swan Song show.

TRANSMISSION: 18-15-20

Dark Souls RPG whatever

core shit:

- Soul economy (kill enemies → get souls → spend on level ups / die → die again)
- Combat feels (light/heavy, parry (roll the same number as your foe?), rolling, armour weight, etc.)
- unlike d+d, characters in ds can't actually die (human/hollow)
- covenants, "multiplayer", exploration
- fixed map / monster spawn points / bonfire effects

characters:

- hp (goes up every level, reduced by attacks + falling, gained back @ bonfire or w/ items [estus])
- stamina (increased w/ stat only, reduced by blocking, reduced by rolling and dodging)
(spend stamina, get boost from shield / shield activates + absorbs, vs. parrying which is a gamble plus-or-minus your DEX or something but avoids + creates a counterstrike opportunity)
- stats (basic stuff to roll, starts low, affects other stuff like damage, stamina, etc.)
- equipment (weapons deal damage, armor absorbs damage, shields allow percentage reduction on a successful block)

systems:

- Souls / advancement (X souls = gain a level, each level you can increase one stat, cost of equipment in souls, etc.)
- combat (attack, block, parry, dodge / deal damage, die)
- monsters (stats, etc.)
- GM stuff (mapping, populating with monsters, themes, etc.)
- miscellaneous player stuff (status effects, covenants, etc.)

The Characters

Core Stats:

- END (increases STAMINA, allows more gear carried)
- STR (increases damage for melee weapons) ~ only those scaled for STR
- DEX (increases damage for DEX scaling weapons, increases casting speed) ~ also dodge/parry
- POI (social stuff, will power, etc.)

Other:

- FAI (magic defense, requirement for spells)
- ATT (gives slots for spell use)
- HUM (allows bonus stuff, also you are not dead)

(what's the core mechanism? how do stats develop? how do you improve w/out the game breaking?
difficulty never goes up...)

Combat brainstorm

boss fights vs. regular mobs, choices about focus (parry / block / attack)

do we need speed
+ STA cost?
— NO —

Simultaneously, both sides choose an action (attack / dodge / parry / block) and resolve

Dodge costs STA

- Attack deals damage
- Dodge allows a roll to avoid harm → but requires somewhere to roll to
- Parry absorbs damage but takes up STA
- Parry allows a chance to stun, then deal 2x damage

- Attack cost STA?
- Successful Dodge grants bonus on next Attack

(the party is one cursed + extra souls, if he dies they all do)

Stamina Regen
+ Aid
to recover STA

8.

Random Design Artifact:

~~DARK SOULS~~ RPG, whatever

Starting on the previous page, I did some random doodling over how one might make the Dark Souls series of games into a tabletop RPG. As I understand it, these games are pretty popular and there've been no shortage of attempts to codify their nature as TTRPGs. Maybe mine is a little different. I included this because I think it's a fun little artifact and shows that not all game designs have to be finished. This is just a messy little thing that never went anywhere, but it might inspire or interest, anyway!

